



# PLANNING FOR SITE DEMONSTRATIONS

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Site demonstrations provide a great opportunity to showcase the benefits of Community Action to select national, state, and local community leaders. State elected officials, county commissioners, and US Senate and House Members and staff should attend these events. They will be surprised at the sophistication of the Program and the advancements made over the years. Invitees will experience the client's circumstances, observe the problem-solving approach being used, and learn how the holistic services provided by CAAs help not only the individual, but the family and community as well. These events strengthen the agency's press and media contacts and provide state and local agencies with positive news coverage. The demonstrations may be highlighted in newspapers, television, and public radio. The site demonstration experience is a tremendous morale booster for staff at all levels – a definite winning combination.

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## Tips for Success

For site demonstrations to be successful, it is important to guide the outcome in your favor.

- The site demonstrations should be hosted by local agencies rather than the state office since "localized" events are deemed more useful for community leaders, allowing them an opportunity to interact with their constituents.
- The site demonstrations are personal in nature and the event must not be allowed to become an "open house" or an event for non-CAA personnel and Board members. Local agency staff should be limited to the Board President, Executive Director, and the specified CAA staff participating in the demonstration. Strict adherence to this concept will provide a solid framework and help project a well-organized public perception.

- Invitations to the press must be carefully distributed. No press conference should be held. Often the press can have a disruptive presence as they try to get camera angles or seek usable "sound bites." Newspaper coverage will normally have the best, most lasting effect. This media outlet usually provides more space for a full explanation of the purpose of CAAs. Invite only one television station since their cameras can be particularly distracting.
- The agenda for the demonstration starts with the introduction of the guests to the CAA customer. A brief overview of the Community Action from the national, state, and local perspectives is provided. Guests are then taken to visit a Community Action site demonstration (i.e. allow the guest to sit in for 15 minutes on an asset building class for low-income individuals and families). After the demonstrations, the CAA staff may guide the guest to a separate room where the guest may speak with a current or former participant(s) about how the CAA is helping them to achieve self-sufficiency. CAA staff may also provide additional information on CAAs and Community Action at this time.
- Morning demonstrations seem to work the best and are the most convenient for the individuals and families, CAA staff, and the guests.
- The site demonstration should be less than an hour in length and limited to no more than 10 guests. These limits show respect for the participants' busy schedules and the belief that smaller groups offer a greater opportunity to concentrate on the various aspects of the CAA without interference and distraction.
- On the day of the demonstration, all CAA staff should prepare for guest arrival 30 minutes to an hour before the scheduled start time. One staff person should be designated to greet the media and distribute information packets. One staff person should provide nametags.
- Feel free to use the planning materials contained in this manual to help your local agencies organize their events. These guides include the criteria for suitable customer selection, a work plan for the site demonstration, a "Tips List" on which community leaders to invite, and a sample agenda.

## Criteria for Customer Selection

The following criteria are recommended for selecting a customer(s) to participate in a site demonstration. These criteria were developed to ensure the most positive perception of the CAA and the citizens it serves.

- It is best if the customer(s) is currently self-sufficient.
- If possible, select a customer who is now actively engaged in making his or her community a better place to live.
- It is also very helpful to show how the services provided by the CAA not only helped the customer but those around them as well. Therefore, customers with dependent family members can be very effective.

***Important:*** Customers should be ready to share their journey to self-sufficiency in their own words. They should also be prepared to answer questions from the invited guests.

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## Tips On Inviting Guests

### Who to Invite

- Agency Board President or designee
- U.S. Congressman for the majority of your service area
- U.S. Senators for the state
- State Senator for the jurisdiction where the site demonstration is being held
- State House Representative(s) for the jurisdiction where the site demonstration is being held
- County Commissioner where the site demonstration is being held
- Key community leaders from companies serving the area

## Things to Remember

- When preparing your invitation list and identifying public officials, remember that crowd control is crucial for a successful site demonstration. A group of 8-10 guests is ideal.
  - When serving multiple counties and holding only one site demonstration, you should focus your efforts on one of the following:
    1. The state legislative representatives and County Commission President from the site demo county only – and maybe one or two ‘key’ politicians from your other counties\*\* (i.e.: Senate or House leadership; **or**
    2. Key legislative members and county commission representatives from throughout the multiple county areas.
  - Obviously not all people invited will be able to attend. All invitees will need to be reminded two or three times – but planning should always allow for no more invited guests than the demonstration area can easily accommodate.
  - Normally, if a U.S. Congressman agrees to attend, they will send a staff person as their representative. One way to increase the odds of their attendance is to contact their Appointment Secretary early and explain the event.
  - It is very important for your office to call your guests the Friday or Monday before the event. This follow up call will remind them of the date and time, certify that they have the directions and know where the site is, answer any questions, and reassure staff that the demonstration will NOT run over one hour. Busy people have very heavy schedules, short memories, and may forget otherwise!
- Important:** Experience has shown that, typically, state legislators do not show up for site demonstrations out of their constituency areas unless an important public official is attending (i.e., U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Governor, Department Secretary, etc.).